



**BEACONS**  *of* **LIGHT**

*Pastoral Planning for Our Third Century*

# **CALLED TO BE CHURCH:**

*A Guide for a Unified Family  
Of Parishes Pastoral Council*

*Revised and approved in 2022*

# INTRODUCTION



The Fathers of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council called all members of the Christian faithful to renew themselves in an image of the Church as the people of God, and as a community in which all of the baptized share in the mission and in the ministry that Jesus Christ entrusted to the Apostles, and through them to the Christian faithful.

Pope Paul VI promulgated the dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, on November 21, 1964.<sup>1</sup> This document's greatest advancement is arguably its recognition of lay persons as valuable members of the people of God and of their co-responsibility in the life and the mission of Church. *Lumen gentium*, no. 33, states:

It is, therefore, the glorious task of all the faithful to work for the ever greater extension of the divine plan of salvation to all people everywhere and of every period. So then let every opportunity be given them to share zealously in the saving work of the church in accordance with their ability and the needs of the times.

In the times since the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, pastors and their parishioners have had a wide range of experiences as they have matured in their understanding of church leadership and of shared responsibility. The 1983 Code of Canon law<sup>2</sup> introduced new direction and insight concerning the area of church leadership, shared responsibility, and collegiality, especially at the parish level. Canon 208 of the 1983 code states:

Flowing from their rebirth in Christ, there is genuine equality of dignity and action among all Christ's faithful. Because of this equality they all contribute, each according to his or her own condition and office, to the building up of the Body of Christ.

This call to shared responsibility explains the nature of the pastoral council in its relationship to the pastor. Canon 536 §1 of the 1983 code says:

If after consulting the council of priests, the diocesan Bishop considers it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish. In this council, which is presided over by the parish priest, Christ's faithful, together with those who by virtue of their office are engaged in the pastoral care of the parish, give their help in fostering pastoral action.

To wit, the purpose of the pastoral council is to explore and to study with the pastor matters of a "pastoral nature," i.e. those areas of parish life that touch the spiritual and the faith development of all members of the parish. Through the parish pastoral council, the pastor is able to discern matters more wisely, in order to fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ in the parish.

## OVERVIEW OF THIS DOCUMENT

The present publication is the result of a project originally initiated by Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk that involved a process of consultation and discussion with pastors and pastoral council leaders throughout the archdiocese. This project was completed in 1996 with a report that was studied by the Administrative Department Directors, the Council of Priests, and the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. The archdiocesan publication, *Called to be Church: A Guide for Parish Pastoral Councils* (1988) was presented as a guide for parish pastoral councils in response to a number of recommendations that resulted from these discussions.

Since the original publication of this guide, the Church has provided additional legislation and guidance with regard to parish pastoral councils. Most recently, the Congregation for the Clergy issued an instruction entitled, *The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church*, which was subsequently approved by Pope Francis on June 27, 2020.<sup>3</sup> In acknowledging the reality of change since the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, this instructions states:

The ecclesiological reflection of the Second Vatican Council, together with the considerable social and cultural changes of recent decades, has resulted in various Particular Churches having to reorganise [sic] the manner in which the pastoral care of Parish communities are assigned. This has made it possible to initiate new experiences, enhancing the dimension of communion and implementing, under the guidance of pastors, a harmonious syntheses of charisms and vocations at the service of the proclamation of the Gospel, which better corresponds to the demands of evangelisation [sic] today.”<sup>4</sup>

To that end, Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr requested that the the original publication be revised and updated, in order to incorporate the product of the Church’s evolution and thought and direction regarding parish life, as well as the role of the pastoral council. This updated and revised publication offers:

1. Clarification of archdiocesan policy with regard to pastoral councils. Seven areas are specifically addressed, and each area provides a variety of guidelines that are in accord with the universal legislation of the Church, as well as with the particular laws, decrees, and instructions of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati relative to parish pastoral councils.
2. An opportunity for pastors and for pastoral council leaders to learn from what other parishes have found to be successful. At the end of each of the first six guidelines, there is a section entitled “Suggestions for Implementation,” which contains examples and best practices that parishes have utilized.

3. Different models of how parish pastoral councils have been structured; how they function; how membership has been determined; and, other ideas about forming successful parish pastoral councils.
4. A response to specific requests made during previous consultation processes, including: questions oftentimes asked about parish pastoral councils; how to conduct an effective council meeting; and utilizing and leading a consensus process.

This updated and revised publication also offers a summary of the Church's legislation and teaching with respect to the pastoral council, as well as seven useful guidelines. The remaining section offers twenty frequently asked questions and responses.

## CONCLUSION



The focus of the pastoral council is on the universal mission of the Church. It provides a mission of service that is exercised in a spirit of collegiality, prayer, and discernment. It brings together the sharing of the gifts and the talents of dedicated clergy and lay members of the Christian faithful. Through their commitment to seek the truth through dialogue and prayerful discernment, the ministry of the Church is active in all the components of the Family of Parishes, and the voice of the Lord is heard. It is greatly hoped that this revised and updated document, *Called to be Church: A Guide for Pastoral Councils*, will assist pastors and members of pastoral councils in carrying out this very important mission of the Church.

# THE FAMILY OF PARISHES & THE PASTORAL COUNCIL

## *A Summary*



The mission of a Catholic parish is to be a community of persons united in the Lord to be God's people ministering to one another, as well as to those around them. It is "a place that brings people together and fosters long-term personal relationships, thereby giving people a sense of belonging and being wanted."<sup>5</sup> The task of serving the faith community is the work of the entire Family of Parishes under the leadership of the pastor. Together with the parish staff, with members of the pastoral council, and with members of other parish commissions and committees, the pastor works in a spirit of unity and collegiality with such groups, in order to serve the mission of the Family of Parishes, of the archdiocese, and of the universal Church.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law indicates that a parish is identified as a community of the Christian faithful, rather than as a building or a series of structures.<sup>6</sup> A Catholic parish is "a community gathered together by the Holy Spirit to announce the Word of God and bring new children of God to birth in the baptismal font."<sup>7</sup>

The parish "is envisioned as a response to a precise pastoral need, namely that of bringing the Gospel to the People through the proclamation of the faith and the celebration of the Sacraments."<sup>8</sup> Due to social and cultural changes over the past decades, however, the territorial configuration of Catholic parishes have been increasingly tasked with discerning and confronting new realities in our contemporary world, which range from an increased mobility and a digital culture, which has "expanded the confines of existence,"<sup>9</sup> to a disproportionality between the number of priests to serve the number of individual Catholic parishes. To such an extent, a Catholic parish "is called upon to read the signs of the times, while adapting both to the needs of the faithful and to historical changes."<sup>10</sup> In light of the ever changing realities of the Catholic parish experience, "the current parish model no longer adequately corresponds to the many expectations of the faithful,"<sup>11</sup> and, as a result, it has become necessary "to identify perspectives that allow for the renewal of 'traditional' Parish structures in terms of mission."<sup>12</sup>

In some cases, and in light of such new realities in our contemporary world, a gradual process of renewal of parish structures has occurred. A consideration of different forms of shared responsibility have emerged that involve the entire people of God. To that end, "new expressions have been added to those of Parish and Vicariates Forane, which are foreseen in the current Code of Canon Law, namely 'pastoral units' and 'pastoral regions.'"<sup>13</sup> These expressions have, in effect, led to the creation and the establishment of new forms of pastoral organization within dioceses, according to the norm of law. Moreover, once a 'pastoral unit' or 'pastoral region' has been established in such a manner, "the Bishop will determine, as appropriate, whether each Parish should have its own Parish Pastoral Council, or whether it is better that this task be entrusted to a single Pastoral Council for all of them."<sup>14</sup>

At the present time, the Archdiocese has discerned that the model of Families of Parishes under the leadership of a single pastor will be the new and normative form of pastoral organization within the archdiocese with the goal that the Family of Parishes will become a canonical parish in the course of the five years between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2027. Therefore, the Family Pastoral Council referred to in this document will become the parish pastoral council of the new parish when the parishes in the Family merge or are suppressed and a new parish is established.

Regardless of the form of pastoral organization, all members of the Christian faithful are called to share in the mission which God has entrusted to them. In fact, “the whole community, and not simply the hierarchy, is the responsible agent of mission, since the Church is identified as the entire People of God.”<sup>15</sup> To that end, among the Christian faithful of a Family of Parishes is a group which assists the pastor in the overall planning of his decision-making for the faith community. It is the pastoral council that assists the pastor in such decision-making. The pastoral council represents the Family of Parishes community, and it has the task of advising the pastor on important matters of pastoral activity. The function of the pastoral council is “to investigate everything pertaining to pastoral activities, to weigh them carefully and to set forth practical conclusions concerning them so as to promote conformity of the life and actions of the People of God with the Gospel.”<sup>16</sup>

Among the variety of ways that the pastoral council carries out its purpose, there are some principal ways:

- By forming an effective group of persons who work in a spirit of prayer and discernment as a sign and a witness to the Family of Parishes that form the community;
- By making recommendations about the pastoral priorities and goals for the Family of Parishes through pastoral planning, including the creation, implementation, and reporting on the annual plan that is submitted to the archbishop;
- By serving as a vehicle of dialogue and communication among the pastor, the parish staff, the various core teams, commissions and organizations, and the Family of Parishes membership; and,
- By working with the various commissions of the Family of Parishes in a spirit of mutual cooperation for the good of the whole faith community.

In its most effective form, the pastoral council is the vehicle by which the pastor and the parish staff consider and test their own ideas with a group that represents the Family of Parishes community. The pastoral council is the official listening post by which the pastor listens to his people and the people listen to their pastor.

*“The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration ... it is a community of communities”<sup>17</sup>*

POPE FRANCIS

## GUIDELINES



1. The pastoral council is a consultative body that assists the pastor in matters of pastoral activity, and it deliberates on matters of importance to the Family of Parishes.
2. The pastoral council works in a spirit of prayer and discernment as a sign and witness to the Family of Parishes.
3. Pastoral planning for the Family of Parishes is the principal activity of the pastoral council.
4. The pastoral council is the primary means by which the voices of the parishioners are represented.
5. All councils, commissions, and committees work in a spirit of mutual cooperation for the good of the Family of Parishes.
6. Selection for the pastoral council shall be determined in a manner which allows for the participation of the Family of Parishes community.
7. Each Family of Parishes develops its own pastoral council guidelines in accordance with the universal law of the Church and with the policies of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

## ENDNOTES



<sup>1</sup> Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, November 21, 1964: AAS 57 (1965) 5-67. English translation from Norman P. Tanner, S.J. Ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London and Washington: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990) 2: 849-900.

<sup>2</sup> *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus* (Vatican City: Libreria Edictrice Vaticana, 1983). English translation from *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 3rd edition, ed. Ernest Caparros et al. (Montreal: Wilson & Lafleur, 2020). All subsequent English translation of canons from this code will taken from this source unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>3</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction “*The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church*,” June 27, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 25.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 27.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 29.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 11.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* no. 16.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 43.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* no. 59. This paragraph continues, “In any case, the individual Parishes within the grouping, since they retain juridic personality and capacity, must maintain their own Finance Councils.”

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 38.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, I, 16 §1 (1966).

<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 28 (2013).

<sup>18</sup> C. 536

<sup>19</sup> C. 537: “In each parish there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to can. 532. It is ruled by the universal law and by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop, and it is comprised of members of Christ’s faithful selected according to these norms.”

<sup>20</sup> For instance, *The Document on Temporal Affairs*, no. 53 states, “The expenditure by a parish of over \$5,000.00 for repairs (except in case of emergency, for capital improvements, for equipment or for contributions for a charitable



purposes [sic], must be submitted to the pastoral council for consultation. An expenditure of over \$25,000.00 for such purposes must be submitted to the pastoral council and receive its consent ...”

<sup>21</sup> Congregation for the Clergy *et aliae*, Instruction “*On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest*,” art. 5 §3, August 13, 1997.

<sup>22</sup> Bible. The Holy Bible. Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2006). All subsequent translations will be taken from this source unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>23</sup> Canon 537: “In each parish there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to can.532. It is ruled by the universal law and by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop, and it is comprised of members of Christ’s faithful selected according to these norms.”

<sup>24</sup> For example, the revised *Document on Temporal Affairs* states that “the basic function of the Finance Committee is to provide necessary research and financial planning. The ultimate responsibility for policy, priority decisions, fund raising, approval and implementation of budgets shall rest, not with the Finance Committee, but with the pastor in consultation with the Parish Council” III, A, 13).

<sup>25</sup> *The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church*,” no. 112.

<sup>26</sup> *cf.* Canon 536 §1.

<sup>27</sup> *cf.* Canon 537.

<sup>28</sup> *cf.* canon 536 §1.

<sup>29</sup> *cf.* Canon 536. See also, the instruction “*On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest*,” art. 5 §3, which states, “It is for the Parish Priest to preside at parochial councils.”

<sup>30</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction “*The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church*,” no. 113.

<sup>31</sup> In fact, the instruction “*On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest*,” art. 5 §3, states. “It is for the Parish Priest to preside at parochial councils. They are to be considered invalid, and hence null and void, and deliberations entered into, (or decisions taken), by a parochial council which has not been presided over by the Parish Priest or which has assembled contrary to his wishes.”

<sup>32</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction “*The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church*,” no. 113.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* See also *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community*, n. 26: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 21 (2002), 843.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 114.

<sup>35</sup> From *CHRIST CALLS US TOGETHER*, p. 44, Diocese of Cleveland. *Used with permission.*